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ABSTRACT

The National PTA Urban Task Force chose to focus on three issues facing urban education: inadequate financing of public education, lack of parental or broad-based community participation in schools, and youth unemployment. The Task Force identified coalition building at local and national levels as the best strategy for helping resolve the selected problems. Three coalition building models are presented. The school finance model emphasizes the development of alternatives to the inequities of a property tax base in order to achieve more uniform and stable financial bases. The parental involvement model stresses increased participation of parents in school, community, and home settings. It encompasses the use of parenting techniques to better enable parents to relate to their children and methods for mobilizing parents to overcome their sense of powerlessness in dealing with home/school factors that affect their children's educational needs. The youth unemployment model focuses on strategies for encouraging elected officials, business and industry leaders, and educators to commit themselves to improving job opportunities for youth. Emphasis is placed on school programs related to resources and training for employment in the community. (Author/MK)

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The PTA in the Urban Context: Phase II

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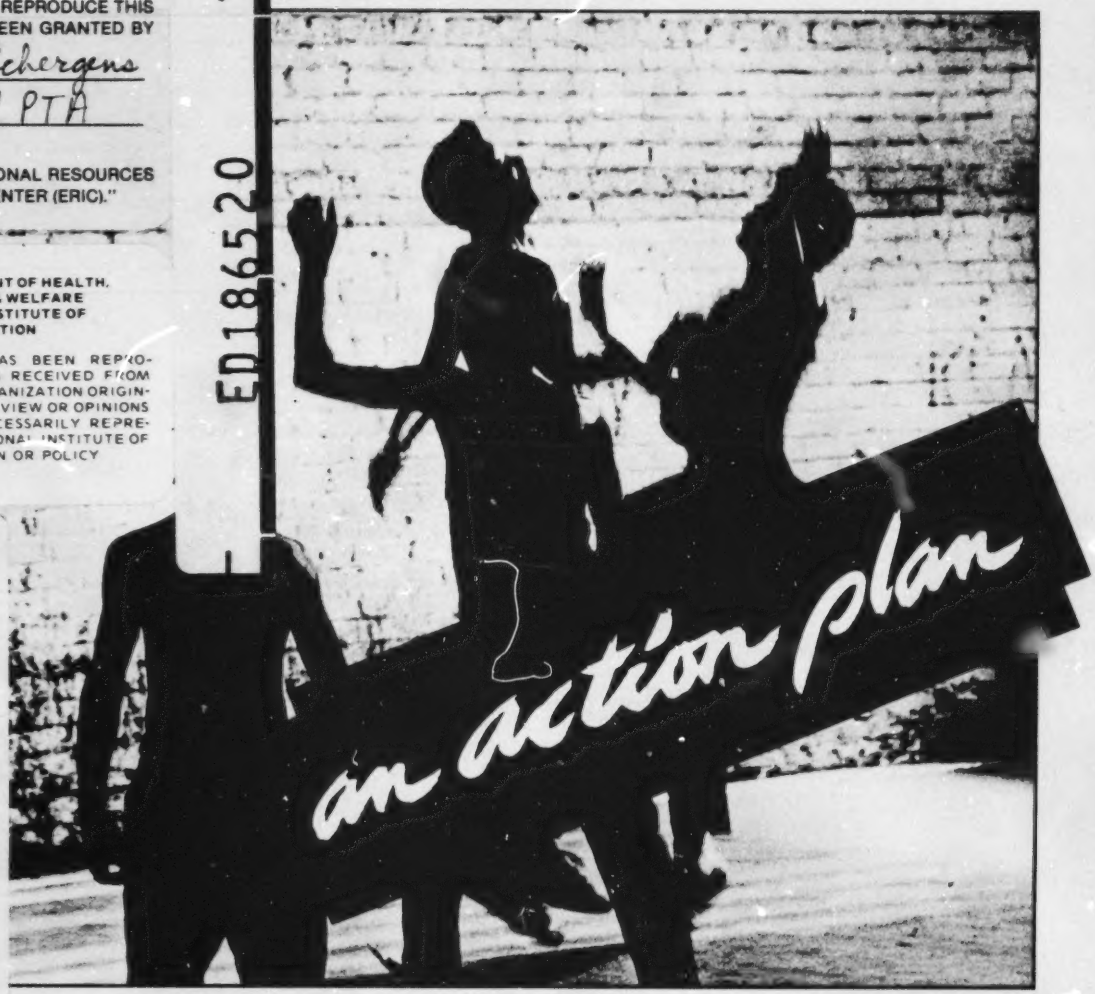

Background

The National PTA's historic commitment to reversing the deterioration of human lives in our cities had its most recent expression through the PTA's Urban Education Project.

This project was inaugurated in 1977 to help the National PTA continue to identify urban school and community problems and, at the same time, to emphasize the need for diverse publics to collaborate in resolving these problems.

During November of that year, Grace Baisinger, then president of the National PTA, created an Urban Advisory Task Force, which she chaired. Invited to serve on the Task Force were parents, PTA officers, educators, and providers of health care and social services, as well as business and labor leaders, government officials, and representatives of other organizations.

Phase I
Task Force Actions

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By September 1978, the 39-member Urban Advisory Task Force concluded that public hearings would be the most effective way of gathering information on important, recurring problems and issues facing the cities and their schools. These data-gathering activities were considered to be Phase I of the Urban Education Project.

Between November 1978 and March 1979, hearings were held in six cities: Philadelphia, Seattle, Houston, Miami, Kansas City (Missouri), and Detroit. The National PTA's theme for the hearings was "The PTA Challenges the Cities: What Can We *Do* for Our Schools?"

The four principal objectives of the hearings were:

- To identify the crucial problems confronting urban areas and their schools.
- To select the most pressing concerns.
- To examine effective ways in which various cities are responding to these challenges.
- To develop new and dynamic strategies for solving urban problems, with parents and students playing leading roles in these endeavors.

In all, 246 persons—including business leaders, teachers, students, government officials, labor leaders, and parents—testified at the hearings.

Following the hearings, two additional data-gathering activities were conducted.

One was a national conference, entitled "The PTA Challenges the Nation's Leaders: What Can We *Do* for Our Schools?" At this conference, held in Washington, D.C., 14 participants from diverse national organizations and federal agencies shared with the Task Force their concerns and perceptions about the problems identified at the hearings.

To involve youth in the data-gathering activity, a national youth forum was held in Miami, Florida, in December 1979. Here, juniors and seniors from the Dade County public high schools shared with a panel of their peers—students from Dade County and from four of the six hearing sites—their perceptions of some of the most pressing problems in their schools and effective solutions.

The youth forum signaled the beginning of Phase II of the Urban Education Project.

Results

The specific charge of the Urban Advisory Task Force was:

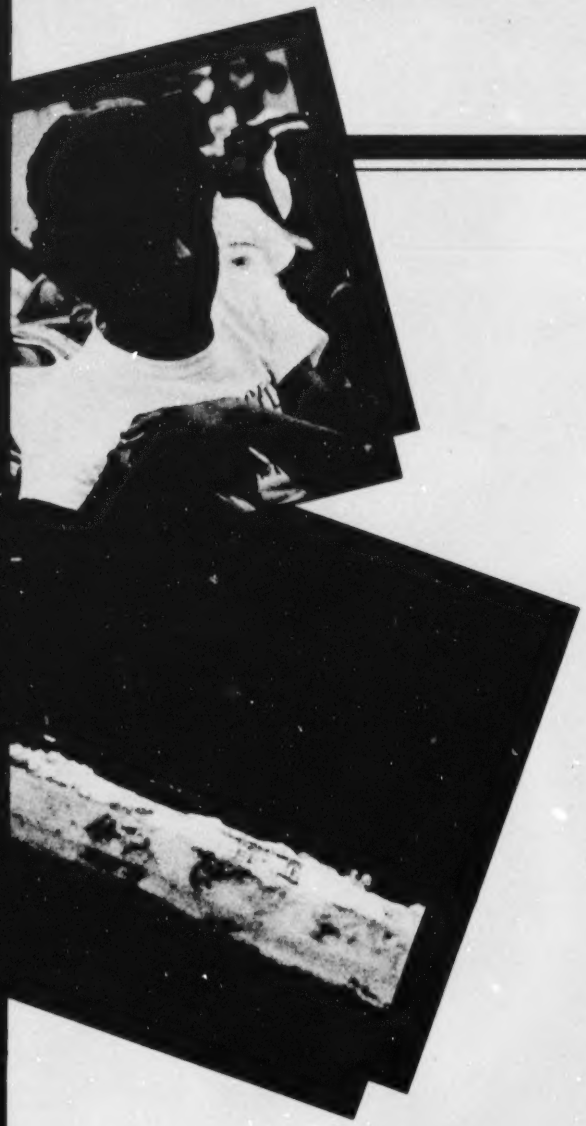
- To identify the problems and issues confronting our cities.
- To establish priorities for the areas of concern where the National PTA can act.
- To develop strategies for finding solutions to these selected problems.

Through the information-gathering activities of Phase I, the Task Force identified ten critical problems affecting six large urban school systems, if not indeed public education throughout America:*

1. Inadequate financing of public education.
2. Lack of parental or broad-based community participation in schools.
3. Low academic achievement and poor student performance.
4. Inability of schools to meet diverse needs of students.
5. General unemployment/youth unemployment.
6. Negative public attitudes about public education.
7. Financial overburden of urban school districts.
8. General violence in both schools and communities.

9-10. A tie between discipline and the inadequate preparation of teachers.

* These problems and other findings from Phase I of the Urban Education Project are discussed in *The PTA in the Urban Context: A Final Report on the Urban Education Project—Phase I.* National PTA, Chicago, Illinois, 1980.



The Task Force further identified the desire of diverse groups of individuals and organizations to work together in solving these problems through the use, initially, of some form or forms of local resources.

The data-base generated from Phase I activities provides the rationale for the action to be taken during Phase II.

For Phase II, the Task Force selected, from among the ten most critical problems, three areas on which the National PTA would concentrate its efforts:

1. Inadequate financing of public education.
2. Lack of parental or broad-based community participation in schools.
3. Youth unemployment.

The Task Force chose these three problems for action because the National PTA has demonstrated its actual or emerging expertise and leadership in these areas, and because these areas offer great potential for building collaborative relationships among diverse urban groups.

an action plan

In determining how best to find workable solutions to the three problems selected for action, the Task Force found it significant that there was widespread acceptance, among the people from different backgrounds and orientations who testified at the hearings, concerning the need for collaboration in solving urban problems.

In recognizing this need, these people—school leaders, students, parents, clergy, government officials, teachers, and representatives of community groups—accepted the idea of the interrelatedness or interconnectedness of groups and individuals in urban areas, and were aware that no one group or individual has the total or unlimited resources to deal with these problems.

The Task Force concurs with these views, and therefore has identified *coalition building* at local and national levels as the best strategy for helping urban individuals and groups resolve these selected problems, with special emphasis on strengthening the roles of parents and students in the problem-solving process.

During Phase II of the Urban Education Project, the National PTA sees itself as a facilitator of coalition building for problem solving. Although opportunities for building coalitions at state and national levels will not be slighted, emphasis during this phase will be on establishing *local* coalitions.

Selected local sites will be offered three models for building coalitions for problem solving. Each model will focus on a separate concern: school finance; parental involvement; and youth unemployment.

The school finance model will emphasize the development of alternatives to the inequities of a property tax base, in order to achieve more uniform and stable finance bases. Such alternatives will include state and federal policies on urban education.

The parental involvement model will stress increased participation of parents in school, community, and family settings. It encompasses the use of parenting techniques to enable parents to relate better to their children, and methods for mobilizing parents to overcome their sense of powerlessness in dealing with home/school factors that affect their children's educational needs.

The youth employment model will focus on strategies for encouraging elected officials, leaders in business and industry, and educators to commit themselves to expanding and improving job opportunities for young people. Emphasis will be placed on school programs that relate directly to resources and training for employment in the community.

The criteria that will be used in selecting local sites will be: (1) the willingness of local groups to conduct

a dialogue on these selected issues; (2) the number of diverse elements at a site that identify one of the selected problems as a common problem; and (3) the willingness and readiness of these groups to collaborate.

The Task Force agrees with findings in the literature that coalition building is a process involving diverse groups that:

- Identify mutual concerns and goals that are solvable.
- Recognize that resources are limited.
- Build relationships that are based on the potential benefits of coordinated, joint action on problems.
- Agree on courses of action that can be accomplished, in part or as a whole, through joint efforts.
- Develop a management plan that allocates tasks among coalition members.

To help reverse the deterioration of human lives in our cities, *especially the wasting of a major portion of a generation of our youth,* and to facilitate the development of coalitions as a means of resolving complex urban problems, the National PTA will conduct the following activities from March 1980 to June 30, 1981:

- Develop local coalitions at one site that participated in the national hearings.
- Develop local coalitions at one site that was not involved in the national hearings.
- Enhance the efforts of local coalitions at one site that has taken the initiative in developing its own network of cooperating organizations, in order to resolve urban problems.
- Develop three models for solving the problems of school finance, parental involvement, and youth unemployment that local sites may adopt as vehicles for coalition building.
- Develop a working paper on building coalitions.
- Provide the elements of documentation, technical assistance, and evaluation to each coalition.
- Develop and put into action an internal management plan for conducting activities during this phase.
- Assist each site in planning and carrying out activities that will assure youth's involvement in the coalition process.
- Train participating local PTA units in the development of coalitions.
- Have individuals and groups from the Urban Advisory Task Force serve as resource specialists in helping local coalitions achieve their goals.
- Prepare a final report on this phase, and disseminate it to local, state, and national organizations.

The National PTA recognizes that, in some cases, efforts to build coalitions to resolve the problems in the three priority areas of concern—school finance, parental involvement, and youth unemployment—will not be completed within the time frame established for Phase II. In those instances, the National PTA will continue to provide the kinds of assistance that are needed.

Throughout all of the activities anticipated for Phase II of the Urban Education Project, the National PTA will maintain an ongoing commitment to the original objectives for this effort: sustaining national attention on the problems afflicting our urban areas and their schools; and generating—as well as implementing—innovative strategies for solving these problems, with parents and students as the key participants.

In making this specific commitment, the National PTA is, in a broader sense, reinforcing its most basic commitment to children. For children are, after all, the most affected by such problems, and the least able to help themselves. It is the National PTA's historic determination that *all* children be provided with a foothold to the future, rather than the despair of undeveloped potential, the promise of unemployment, and the end of hope. We can do no less!

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